Address by

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Commencement

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(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

This is so fine and hopeful and fitting an occasion that it seems somehow lacking in good manners to speak of troubles to come. And yet having arrived at Middlebury fifty-four years ago, as a member of the Navy's V-12 program, and being alive to tell of the years that followed, speaks of troubles surmounted. Troubles greater by far than any we now face or are likely to do.

1944 was a grim year. War raged across the world. War would go on a long while; and young men did not have much time. I was then a great reader of A. E. Housman and took on many of his knowing airs. How do the lines go?

I to my perils
  Of cheat and charmer
  Came clad in armour
By stars divine.
Hope lies to mortals
  And most believe her,
  But man's deceiver
Was never mine.

The thoughts of others
  Were light and fleeting,
  Of lovers' meeting
Or luck or fame.
Mine were of trouble,
  And mine were steady;
  So I was ready
When trouble came.

And trouble surely came. On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese of Hiroshima, three days later Nagasaki, and then V.J. day -- Victory in Japan Day -- on August 15. On a purely personal basis this was something of a reprieve. I was not, after all, headed for an amphibious landing somewhere in the Japanese archipelago. But the atomic age had begun. By 1949,

the Soviet Union had its own atom bomb, and in 1951 war broke out on the Korean Peninsula. It was sure to spread.

I was then in London on a Fulbright scholarship, still in the Naval Reserve and was called up. Our detail, some dozen officers of various ranks, mustered at the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square. By late afternoon, we were crossing Holland, headed for the former German submarine base at Bremerhaven. I had brought along a copy of Hannah Arendt's recently published masterwork, *The Origins of Totalinarianism*. (A wondrous woman -- I would get to know her years later. German, Jewish, she had escaped to the United States in 1941, bringing with her the devastating insights of someone who had seen totalitarianism up close.) I settled into our compartment, began reading and then read aloud her opening paragraph.

> Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace for the victor have ended in the anticipation of a third World War between the two remaining world powers. This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died.[1]

No one said a word until at last a Lt. Commander allowed as how "There must be a bar car somewhere on this train."

The war did not spread but the threat remained. President Kennedy would capture our mood in an address to the UN General Assembly in 1961:

> Today every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable. Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or madness.[2]

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[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1951) vii.

[2] President John F. Kennedy, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly,* New York City, September, 1961.

Yet here we are, near a half century later, and this hasn't happened. Nuclear weapons -- soon to include the hydrogen bomb -- grew to vast numbers on both sides with ever more threatening modes of delivery: ballistic missiles, nuclear submarines, the like. And yet it never happened. "It" being nuclear war. The bomb proved the ultimate deterrent. There were two "sides" in the world, two vast alliances, but the more weapons accumulated the more stable the confrontation became. Or so it seemed.

I was a member of the subcabinet of President John F. Kennedy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. There was almost a nuclear exchange that time, but at the last minute, as Dean Rusk remarked, the Soviets "blinked" and pulled back. Little by little confidence measures evolved. Atmospheric testing was banned. Arms control treaties commenced. At first these did little more than legitimize the plans for increased weaponry on either side, but in time we began to agree on actual reductions as between the United States and the Soviet Union. Then, of a sudden, the Soviet Union imploded. Soviet ideology, once a confident doctrine of universal truths and great expectations simply vaporized. Without a shot being fired.

Fate seemed to have granted the whole world a reprieve. There were no parades, no celebrations of any kind really, but clearly the cold war was over and the west had won. America had won and we would now at the end of the century of warfare, ever more dreadful warfare, finally have peace.

Fate lies to mortals. For of a sudden we face the prospect of nuclear exchange as we have not done for a generation.

In this instance involving, incredibly enough, a nuclear exchange with Russia itself. This has come about with an eerie irony. The vast military forces of the Soviet Union have dissipated, and near to disappeared. All that remains are their nuclear weapons. And so the Russian Duma refuses to ratify the START II treaty, signed by

Presidents Yeltsin and Bush in 1993, that would reduce nuclear forces by some two thirds from their their cold war height. As a leader of the largest bloc of votes in the Duma put it recently, "Now that the country's defense complex and armed forces have been ruined, we cannot eliminate the last nuclear shield."[3]

More to the point, some four years ago Russia formally renounced the no-first -use policy that for so long maintained peace with the West. This was reaffirmed in a statement of official strategic doctrine published in Moscow last December.

Russia reserves the right to use all the forces and systems at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, if the unleashing of armed aggression results in a threat to the actual existence of the Russian Federation as an independent sovereign state. [4]

It was 1936 that Robert K. Merton wrote his famous paper on "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action." Can there have been a more striking example that the end of the cold war, after an half century of containment by the West, would renew the prospect of nuclear war. And next, as if fate were growing malevolent, the United States government set out to expand the North Atlantic Alliance eastward toward Russia -- in the case of Poland to the very border of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Having already promised much the same to the three Baltic nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, two of which border directly on Russia.

George F. Kennan, the most revered and validated diplomat and historian of the second half of our century, the man who conceived far back in 1947 of the doctrine of containment -- wait the Soviets out -- pleaded with the Senate not to ratify the proposed extension by saying that "expanding NATO would be the most

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[3] David Hoffman, "Communists Seen Blocking Yeltsin on START II Ratification," *The Washington Post*, 19 May, 1998, A 22.

[4] Russian National Security Blueprint, 17 December, 1997, p. 19 (Trans. by FBIS Dec. 26, 1997, Doc. ID: FTS19971230000280[0]).

fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era."[5]

In the debate, when at last we took the bother of having one, I offered with Senator Warner of Virginia, an amendment that would require Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic first to become members of the European Union, such that their economies might prosper before their armies grew. I got 17 votes. Next, with Senator Warner as lead sponsor we proposed to wait at least three years before further expansion. We got 41 votes, whereupon the expansion was approved 80 - 19. The while Russian officials kept repeating we are risking nuclear war.

And now, less than two weeks ago, the Government of India set off five nuclear explosions, including a hydrogen bomb. The government of the United States expressed consternation. The Indians had deceived us; the intelligence community had failed. On and on. All nonsense.

Twenty-four years ago on May 19, 1974, India exploded its first "peaceful" nuclear device. Again consternation, mixed with just a bit of condescension. Did they know how to do such things? I was then our ambassador in New Delhi and it fell on me to call on Prime Minister Gandhi to relate our concern. I had expected a tense encounter; as it turned out it was almost friendly. The Department of State has just released my reporting cable, which begins:

> IN A FRIENDLY EASY TALK THIS MORNING PRIME MINISTER GANDHI STATED THAT IF A COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY WERE 'PROPOSED WHICH BROUGHT EVERYBODY IN AND WAS NOT DISCRIMINATORY, THEN INDIA WOULD BE FOR IT.'[6]

Surely this was a proposal to talk these things through. In her closing remarks she asked that I convey her warm regards to President Nixon, the first time

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[5] George F. Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *The New York Times*, 5 February, 1998.

[6] In a cable from New Delhi on June 19, 1974, US Ambassador to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, telegraphed this message to the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger in Washington, DC. (Declassified by the US State Department on 5/14/98, Doc. No. NEWDE 08150).

ever. India was going to be a nuclear power, but not necessarily a destabilizing one. Alas, we did nothing. President Nixon left office. The Cold War went on. The following autumn word leaked in Washington of the American involvement in the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile. Indians were wild; would they be next. In a cable from Delhi, leaked in Washington, I wrote:

> And of course the news from the United States, as printed in the Indian press, repeatedly confirms her worst suspicions and genuine fears.
>
> Nothing will change her unless she is satisfied that the United States accepts her India. She does not now think we do. She thinks we are a profoundly selfish and cynical counter-revolutionary power...
>
> She will accordingly proceed to develop nuclear weapons and a missile delivery system preaching non-violence all the way.[7]

A quarter century goes by. A Hindu Nationalist Party comes to office, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as the head of a multiparty coalition. The Party's Political Manifesto, issued before the four day February/March elections is explicit:

> The BJP rejects the notion of nuclear apartheid and will actively oppose attempts to impose a hegemonistic nuclear regime. We will not be dictated to by anybody in matters of security and in the exercise of the nuclear option.[8]

And, to say again, they have done just that. Pakistan may be next. A nuclear coalition led by China with North Korea and Pakistan as adherents is already a fact of life in Asia, as are the Chinese nuclear weapons in Tibet aimed at India.

It does not follow that there will now ensue armageddonic encounters. Michael Kelly writing in the *National Journal* is surely correct in his view that the

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[7] Seymour M. Hersh, "Concern by India on CIA related," *New York Times*, 13 September 1974, A11.

[8] Bharatiya Janata Party, *Election Manifesto*, February 1998, 30.

collapse of the Soviet Union deprived India of a nuclear umbrella which diminished the danger of Chinese aggression, and so made it more urgent for the Indians to emerge as a "declared" nuclear power in the parlance of arms control. Surely India is no threat to the United States. Indeed Indian leaders continue to talk of joining in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). On Monday the 18th, Jaswant Singh, a close aide to the Prime Minister said, "We are ready to engage in meaningful discussions for India's subscription to the CTBT subject to our reservations." Almost word for word as Prime Minister Gandhi put it a quarter century ago. India has proven an exemplary power in terms of controlling the proliferation of nuclear gadgetry. The immediate threat to world peace comes from "rogue" states such as Iran and Iraq which would get nuclear weapons for the purpose of using them. In the long run, danger almost surely will be an overconfident and expansive China; arming Pakistan such that an "Islamic Bomb" appears in the Middle East, provoking a necessary response from Israel, and so on and so on.

Whatever else, this wholly unexpected set of events cries out for attention and maturity. It is half a century and more since the United States first exploded a nuclear device at Alamogordo, New Mexico. Looking on the mushroom cloud that followed the incredible blast, J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted the Hindu God Shiva from the *Bhagavad Gita*, "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."[9]

The same could have been said at the Pokaran test site in India two weeks ago. We started all this; and surely we must in our efforts deal with this ultimate danger, a danger not just to ourselves but as President Kennedy said, to the planet itself. Somehow our attention has wandered off in other directions. The United States Senate is yet even to ratify that Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which we first proposed. Events in South Asia may get our attention back. Let us hope. And as you go out into the world it is urgent that your generation insist we get on with this first priority of modern civilization, but for now, let the games begin.

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[9] J. Robert Oppenheimer, 16 July, 1945, quoting the *Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 11, sect. 32; cited in *Current Biography Yearbook*, 1964, 331.